# National Role Conceptions in the 'Global Korea' Foreign Policy Strategy



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〈CONTENTS〉



· **Key words :** South Korean foreign policy, role theory, national role conceptions, Global Korea

【ABSTRACT】

This article analyses the 'Global Korea' foreign policy strategy using the role theory framework of foreign policy analysis. A number of roles held by foreign policy makers form the 'national role conception' which describes the shared understanding concerning the proper role and purpose of a nation as a player in the international arena. These roles are affected by the expectations of the international system with its underlying norms as well as domestic interpretations of such norms. Domestic trends and socialization also contribute to the national role conception. I identify the national role conception of Korean foreign policy makers and the influences on the recent changes in their conception. The study explores how the actors interpret and perceive the functions and roles national foreign policy fulfills. The 'Global Korea' foreign policy initiative of the Lee Myung-bak government is the source

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material for a content analysis to gain insights in the influences on the construction of their role performance. South Korea increased its overseas development aid and participation in peacekeeping operations. Other roles include the repositioning as a global player, a culturally relevant nation as well as an economic power. The latter two roles are highlighted in the 'Global Korea' initiative, showing the domestic influences and continuation of previous role performances on national role conception among foreign policy makers. The analysis shows the linkage of foreign policy making and roles that are influenced by cultural and societal factors.

## Ⅰ. Introduction

The Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea or Korea) has undergone dramatic changes over the last sixty years. The country developed from an agricultural society ruined by the Korean War into one of the top fifteen economies in the world. Politically, Korea is an often-cited successful case of the third wave of democracy, establishing a lively democratic system since the 1990s.[1)] These developments have also affected changes in the foreign policy of South Korea, which is dominated by the security threat by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) and the close relationship with the United States. In the early twenty-first century, successive South Korean governments have expanded foreign policy goals, as indicated by the participation in peacekeeping operations (PKO) and the increase in overseas development aid (ODA). These activities are the result of a change in Korea's national role conception which is driven by a changing global environment and diversified understanding of Korea's role in the world.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the expansion of foreign policy priorities, this study proposes a role theory framework. As an analytical tool,

1) Larry Diamond and Byung-Kook Kim (eds.), *Consolidating Democracy in South Korea* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Samuel S. Kim (ed.), *Korea's Democratization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

role theory provides a deeper understanding of the influences on foreign policy making and a frame to explore not only the leaders' self-conceptualization of a country's role in international politics but also to venture beyond the individual or state as level of analysis to the systemic dynamics of role change. The concept of 'national role conception' describes the shared understanding concerning the proper role and purpose of a nation as a player in the international arena. Since a number of roles can coexist and, at time, create tension in the foreign policy making process, role theory can explain contradictions in foreign policy measures of a state. A closer reading of Korean policies—the national role performance—indicates a transformation initiated not only by changing international expectations of a prosperous, democratic nation but also the perceptions of Korea's leaders of such expectations. At the same time, the notion of the state as a promoter of Korean economic interests continues to influence the national role conception. Moreover, societal influences, such as cultural nationalism, are reflected in the measures to promote the influence and cultural recognition of Korea on a global level.

This article begins with a short overview of the key concepts of role theory in foreign policy analysis. This is followed by an analysis of the changes in Korean foreign policy in the early twenty-first century. A focal point is the foreign policy and national security vision of the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008-2013), 'Global Korea.'[2] This provides insights into a different facet of Korean foreign policy making beyond the security concerns on the peninsula. Methods of investigation are interpretative, based on the empirical evidence of official publications and statements. The roles are treated as the dependent variable, influenced by international and domestic norms and expectations.[3] In order to explore the changes in the national role conception with regard to international conventions and expectations, South

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2) 'Global Korea' describes a detailed plan of 20 objectives and 100 tasks of government policy that were coded according to the role they represent. Cheong Wa Dae, "Global Korea: The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Korea" (Seoul: Cheong Wa Dae, 2009), available at <http://english.president.go.kr/government/golbalkorea/globalkore_eng.pdf> (accessed on 20 December 2010).

3) This contrasts with other analyses that use roles as independent variables to explain foreign policy decisions. For example, see Stephen G. Walker (ed.), *Role Theory and Foreign Policy Analysis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987).

Korean ODA and involvement in PKO as well as the focus on cultural exports are covered. These policies are informed by perpetuated conception of the state's role as well as societal influences on the leaders' national role conception and national role performance. As a caveat, this study does not evaluate the effectiveness of such policies but focuses on the motivation behind their inception.

## Ⅱ. Role Theory

Since the late 1950s, foreign policy analysis (FPA) has developed as a subfield of international relations, focusing on the institutions and main actors of the foreign policy making process rather than foreign policy outcomes.[4] While many scholars of international relations black-box the state as one group, FPA is actor-centered, with a focus on the agents in the policy-making process and the factors that influence foreign policy decision making and decision makers. FPA is interdisciplinary, drawing on insights of many intellectual traditions, including economics, psychology and sociology.[5] FPA takes a multilevel approach, as both international and domestic factors are considered to affect the course and outcome of the decision-making process. The mind of a foreign policy maker is not a tabula rasa; beliefs, attitudes, and values affect their decision-making processes, as they are embedded in the societal and cultural institutions and traditions of the states they represent.[6] Their decisions are thus affected by ideational factors and the self-perceived roles of foreign policy makers, the psychological and societal milieu.[7]

In order to theorize this behavior, Holsti introduces the concept of role theory, borrowing from sociology and social psychology.[8] Holsti's model of

4) Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1-1 (March 2005), pp. 1-30.
5) For an overview, see Valerie M. Hudson, "The History and Evolution of Foreign Policy Analysis," in Steve Smith, Amanda Hatfield, and Tim Dune (eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 11-30.
6) *Ibid*., p. 20.
7) Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout, *Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956).
8) K. J. Holsti, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 14-3 (September 1970), pp. 233-309.

national role conception counters structuralist analyses of foreign policy by seeking to portray how a nation views itself and its role in the international arena, focusing on the perceptions of the more salient elite.[9] The assumptions and values these individuals bring to their interactions with others are referred to as 'role', and the behavior when performing a role as 'role performance'. The decisions and actions governments take vis-à-vis other actors in order to implement the role are referred to as 'national role performance.'[10]

Holsti's empirical work indicates that actors usually take multiple roles in the international system and its sub-systems.[11] As a result of these different roles, foreign policy actions and outcomes are not fixed across all issues or sets of relationships.[12] Holsti and successive writers have identified numerous roles, such as faithful ally, regional collaborator, defender of the faith, mediator, balancer, civilian state, and recognized member of the international community.[13] These roles contribute to the formation of a national role conception. Holsti describes national role conceptions as "the policy makers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules, and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in the subordinate regional systems."[14] National role conceptions are thus a set of norms expressing expected foreign policy behavior and actions. They provide a sense of identity and describe the purpose of the state in the international arena.[15] National role conceptions motivate wills and goals and encourage certain actions over others. A role conception offers standards and guidelines that affect preferences in the decision-making process. With its focus on roles, role theory provides an analytical tool to link identity-construction and

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9) Valerie M. Hudson, 2008, *op. cit*., p. 22.
10) K. J. Holsti, *op. cit*., p. 240.
11) Holsti finds an average number of different role conceptions to be 4.6 in his sample from the mid-1960s, excluding roles mentioned only once, the average number is 3.4 roles. See K. J. Holsti, *op. cit*., pp. 277-278.
12) *Ibid*., p. 255.
13) Holsti's roles emanate from a Cold War-setting. Other scholars have added roles; see, for instance, Naomi Bailin Wish, "Foreign Policy Makers and Their National Role Conceptions," *International Studies Quarterly* 24-4 (December 1980), pp. 532-554; Stephen G. Walker, *op. cit*.
14) K. J. Holsti, *op. cit*., pp. 245-246.
15) Naomi Bailin Wish, *op. cit*.

foreign policy behavior. Role theory was initially used to explain the foreign policy-making process in particular of smaller states during the Cold War era but it has found renewed interest since the 1990s.[16] The framework is, for instance, used in analyses of national role conceptions among member states of the European Union.[17] Critics of role theory continue to study the state as a 'black box' actor, focusing on structures while disregarding the effects of identity formation and cultural and societal context.[18]

Roles and the formation of national role conceptions are prompted by a number of factors, domestic as well as international. When creating a national role conception, foreign policy makers are motivated by the cultural values, norms and the established identity of their nation.[19] They translate these influences into a national role conception that resonates with the broader domestic social discourse.[20] National roles are by no means always consensual; they can be contested both between elites and between the public and elites.[21] Beyond the individual level of decision makers, roles are internal constructions of a collective self of a nation. Roles are thus elements of state and national identity and situated in a cultural and social context. In colloquial terms, national role conceptions encapsulate what "we want and what we do as a result of who we think we are, want to be, and should be,"

16) Sebastian Harnisch, "Introduction and Defining of Key Terms of Analysis," in Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, and Hanns W. Maull (eds.), *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses* (London: Routlegde, 2011), pp. 7-15; Vendulka Kubálková (ed.), *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2001).

17) Lisbeth Aggestam, "Role Theory and European Foreign Policy: A Framework of Analysis," in Ole Elgstrøm, Michael Smith (eds.), *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 11-29; For Ukraine and Belarus: Glenn Chafetz, Hillel Abramson, and Suzette Grillot, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy: Belarussian and Ukrainian Compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," *Political Psychology* 17-4 (December 1996), pp. 727-757. For Japan: Amy L. Catalinac, "Identity Theory and Foreign Policy: Explaining Japan's Responses to the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 U.S. War in Iraq," *Politics and Policy* 35-1 (March 2007), pp. 58-100.

18) Most notably, Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

19) Lisbeth Aggestam, *op. cit*.

20) Marijke Breuning, "Role Research: Genesis and Blind Spots," in Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, Hanns W. Maull (eds.), *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 16-35.

21) Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaaarbo, "Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8-1 (January 2012), pp. 5-24.

where the "we" represents nation and state as a social collectivity."[22]

Since national role conceptions are shared, and social and historically constructed, they tend not change automatically with the change of an administration (revolutionary events apart). Harnisch, for instance, argues that the stability and continuity of German foreign policy culture after the end of the Cold War is a result of national role conceptions.[23] However, within such conceptions, priorities may change, depending on factors such as government majorities, public opinion and international actors. Maull describes role conceptions as broad guidelines for decision makers that they "can and must interpret."[24] Foreign policy elites (in a democracy) play a 'two- level' game, the simultaneous play of the game of domestic politics and the game of international politics.[25] Nevertheless, national role conceptions are susceptible to (albeit slow) change. In the 1990s, Germany's role conception of being a civilian power, for instance, was challenged by the possibility of military involvement abroad.[26]

In addition to ideational factors, structural and material factors also affect national role conception, namely the policy makers' perceptions of the state's capability and opportunity to act in the international system.[27] The role is their image of the general types of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state in the external environment.[28] National role conceptions are foreign policy makers' interpretations of the international environment and the opportunities and challenges it holds. The interpretation of the operational environment has been referred to as the psycho-milieu in the classic work of Harold and Margaret Sprout.[29] Foreign policy outcomes can

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22) Ulrich Krotz, *National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policies: France and Germany Compared* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for European Studies, 2002).
23) Sebastian Harnisch, "Change and Continuity in Post-Unification German Foreign Policy," *German Politics* 10-1 (January 2001), pp. 35-60.
24) Hanns W. Maull, "Hegemony Reconstructed? America's Role Conception and its 'Leadership' within Its Core Alliances," in Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, and Hanns W. Maull (eds.), *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 167-193.
25) Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42-3 (Summer 1988), pp. 427-460.
26) Hanns W. Maull, "German Foreign Policy, Post-Kosovo: Still a 'Civilian Power'?" *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 42-2 (Summer 2000), pp. 56-80.
27) Marijke Breuning, *op. cit*., p. 26.
28) K. J. Holsti, *op. cit*., pp. 245-246.

be affected by the differences of such perceptions and the real operational milieu. National role conceptions are susceptible to external influences, the 'role prescriptions' of the international system, adding a structural dimension to role theory.[30] Role prescriptions emanate from the external environment, the expectations of international actors and norms. Role theory thus links structural variables (international norms) with agency (national role conception). This link of structure and agency is a key contribution of role theory to foreign policy analysis. The focus on actors and interpretations of discourses has attracted some attention among constructivists in international relations, although in this literature, 'role' is often replaced by 'identity'.[31] Benes considers role theory as a bridge between constructivist international relations theory and foreign policy analysis.[32] These connections are the subject of ongoing theoretical debates that are beyond the scope of this study.[33]

Role prescriptions have a dual affect, in the form of direct expectations as well as the interpretation of domestic actors of their perceived role. The literature denotes these two dimensions of role conceptions as the ego part and the alter ego part.[34] The ego part refers to the self-expectations of the role holder, the self-conceptualization of a state's purpose by its leadership. The alter ego part relates to the roles international institutions expect the role holders to act upon, affecting national foreign policy role conception. International institutions and norms set a framework for foreign policy makers to aspire to, having a constitutive and regulative impact. These have changed substantially with the end of the Cold War and the onset of globalization. Roles are often associated with social positions and, in the case

29) Harold Sprout and Margaret Sprout, *op. cit*.
30) See Stephen Walker, *op. cit*.
31) Sebastian Harnisch, 2011, *op. cit*. For further discussion see also Vendulka Kubálková, *op. cit*. This study is in line with a post-positivist approach to international relations and FPA. See Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Constructivism and Foreign Policy," in Steve Smith, Amanda Hatfield, and Tim Dune (eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 71-82.
32) Vít Benes, "Role Theory: A Conceptual Framework for the Constructivist Foreign Policy Analysis?" paper presented at the Third Global International Studies Conference "World Crisis: Revolution or Evolution in the International Community?" hosted by the University of Porto, Portugal, 17-20 August 2011, p. 3.
33) Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaaarbo, *op. cit*.
34) Alexander Wendt, *op. cit*.; Sebastian Harnisch, 2011, *op. cit*.

of the international system, with levels of economic and political development.[35] Democratic states are generally more likely to engage in formal international organization than nondemocratic countries.[36] If a state's position or ability to contribute changes, international institutions and norms may challenge the status quo and expect adjustments in the national role conception. Mature states "often ascribe roles to novices in the international arena," expecting them to follow established rules and norms.[37] As a result, novices tend to have fewer roles, but their number grows as their social capacity for interaction increases.[38]

While FPA-studies mainly focus on the relationship between roles and the involvement in international system, national role conceptions (and their analysis) are also affected by changes in the perception of power. There has been a growing recognition that nations exert influence not only by economic and military means but also by other factors. Introducing the notion of 'soft power', Joseph Nye contrasts the hard power of military might with the soft power of cultural influences such as movies and culture.[39] Through these means, a nation can promote a positive image that other aspire to, a lifestyle imbued with values in favor of the host nation. Nye thus links the attractiveness of a country—its soft power—to its ability to influence others.[40] In the twenty-first century, communication and ideas are becoming more important than the values of geopolitics, indicating a shift toward 'postmodern power.'[41] Despite their growing popularity, the theoretical and analytical frameworks of these approaches remain underdeveloped.[42] While it

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35) K. J. Holsti, *op. cit*., p. 239.
36) Edward Mansfield and Jon Pevehouse, "Democratization and International Organizations," *International Organization* 60-1 (January 2006), pp. 137-167.
37) Cameron Thies, "Role Theory and Foreign Policy," *International Studies Association Compendium, Foreign Policy Analysis Section* (May 2009), available at <http://myweb.uiowa.edu/bhlai/workshop/role.pdf> (accessed on 2 March 2013), p. 8.
38) K. J. Holsti, *op. cit*., p. 284.
39) Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
40) *Ibid*., p. 4.
41) Peter van Ham, "Place Branding: The State of the Art," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616-1 (March 2008), pp. 126-149.
42) For example, see Jan Melissen, "The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice," in Jan Melissen (ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 3-27; Craig Hayden, *The Rhetoric of*

is beyond the purpose of this study to discuss the concept of soft power in any depth, it has to be noted that foreign policy makers' roles are also influenced by notions of cultural relevance and soft power, the indirect influence on other countries' foreign policy through material and nonmaterial means.

## Ⅲ. Korean Role Conceptions

The conflict with North Korea overshadows South Korean foreign policy. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the survival of the state and the assurance of international support dominated foreign policy concerns. In the nation role conception, South Korea was perceived as a client state of a stronger state (the United States) to deter its adversaries. This role has been contested by progressive forces, in particular after democratization in 1988. The Korean presidency is endowed with substantial powers and thus assumes leadership in role performance in the name of their administration (the level of analysis in this study). Given the concentration of power, the divergence in role priorities among the various actors on the national level is less pronounced than in other countries, especially compared to parliamentary systems.[43)]

Reflecting their political outlook, previous administrations placed different priorities on the role of client state and faithful ally. Presidents Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) promoted an engagement policy with North Korea in addition to the US-Korean alliance. Roh aimed to gain some leeway in the US-Korean alliance by promoting the idea of Korea as a 'balancing power in Northeast Asia' pursuing a more equal relationship with China and the United States.[44)] His successor Lee Myung-bak took a hardline approach to North Korea and returned to prioritizing the US-Korean strategic alliance. Parallel to these developments, role conceptions have

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*Soft Power: Public Diplomacy in Global Contexts* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012). This also poses a challenge to realist IR theory.

43) For a discussion of horizontally disputed roles, see Cristian Cantir and Juliet Kaarbo, *op. cit*., pp. 12-13.

44) Roh Moo-hyun, "Address at the 53rd Commencement and Commissioning Ceremony of the Korea Air Force Academy," Cheong Wa Dae (8 March 2005), available (in the past) at <http://english.president.go.kr/> (accessed on 1 June 2005).

expanded, since, as President Lee aptly points out, "national security cannot be served by defense alone."[45] The Lee administration's Global Korea strategy "refers to a Korea that leaves behind a habit of diplomacy narrowly geared to the Korean Peninsula, and adopts a more open and enterprising posture that sees the world stage as the appropriate platform for its foreign policy and national interest."[46] The (initial) policy goals of the new administration under President Park Geun-hye (since February 2013) place less emphasis on foreign policy goals beyond the Korean peninsula, but also note the role of "responsible middle power contributing to world peace and progress."[47] This study focuses on three national role conceptions that have undergone profound changes in the last decades, independent of government majorities, that of a responsible global player, economic power, and a culturally relevant nation.[48]

South Korea has made the transition from an agricultural nation ruled by an authoritarian government to an advanced economy with a democratic administration within the last sixty years. In terms of GDP, material wealth, population and military capability, South Korea has joined the rank of middle powers in the international system.[49] Stepping out of the shadow of Cold War alliances, Korea is looking for recognition on its own terms as a proud and respected nation with economic power. In line with these developments, national role conceptions changed from a protectee of the United States to a more independent, internationally responsible actor. Korea's democratization brings concerns of human rights and peace on both domestic and global levels to the foreground of policy concerns.[50] Consequently, Korea has

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45) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*, p. 5.
46) *Ibid*, p. 13.
47) Cheong Wa Dae, *140 Policy Talks*, not dated, available at <http://english.president.go.kr/government/policy/policy04.php> (accessed on 24 March 2013).
48) Korean activities in the United Nations and the Six-Party Talks are therefore also not covered. This would be the topic of a separate analysis of contested roles.
49) Sook-Jong Lee, "South Korea as New Middle Power: Seeking Complex Diplomacy," *EAI Asia Security Initiative Working Paper* 25 (2012); Jeffrey Robertson, "South Korea as a Middle Power: Capacity, Behaviour, and Now Opportunity," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 16-1 (June 2007), pp. 151-174.
50) The Global Korea strategy includes the aim to "place priority on the national interest while pushing pragmatic diplomacy balanced conducive to the good of all peoples" and promises an increase in financial contributions and role to support the United Nations and other major international organizations. Cheong Wa Dae, *Government Policy Goals*,

expanded its efforts in ODA and became more proactive with regard to UN-led and multinational PKO.[51)]

Recent changes in the perception of power have affected national role conceptions as well. A shift from security and economic concerns to less tangible notions of culture, values, and ideas can be observed, coinciding with the emergence of notions of soft power and nation brand. These changes are reflected in the role of a culturally relevant nation that is widely respected. Korean decision makers note that Italy, for instance, is ranked much higher in international comparison in terms of cultural and historic value, despite being economically less successful.[52)] The shift away from hard power is highlighted in the strategic plans, including the ambition "to cultivate our soft power and to bring about a qualitative improvement in the Republic of Korea's global standing" as well as "enhancing the value of Korea's state brand globally."[53)] Coinciding with the growing popularity of Korean TV-programs and pop music in East Asia and further afield, foreign policy makers and commentators discovered the value of Korea's soft power (and perceived lack thereof). This is informed by another perception of influential powers: that of influential cultural presence.

A related role can be described as 'nation with economic power'. The designers of the strategy expect economic prowess to become a more critical determinant of a country's relative standing and power in the twenty-first century.[54)] The rapid economic development of Korea was a result of a close relationship between the state and business (developmental state).[55)] This connection affects the ego part of the role perception as national and international actor and continues to influence the democratic policy-making

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not dated, available at <http://english.president.go.kr/government/goals/goals.php> (accessed on 13 November 2012); Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 26.

51) Philipp Olbrich and David Shim, "South Korea as a Global Actor: International Contributions to Development and Security," *GIGA Focus* 2012-2 (2012b).

52) Dong-Hun Lee, *"Korea Nation" Brand in 2012* (Samsung Economic Research Institute: Korea Economic Trends, 2013), available at <http://www.asia.udp.cl/Informes/2013/Korea EconomicTrends-SERI.pdf> (accessed on 20 March 2013).

53) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 20; Cheong Wa Dae, *Government... op. cit*.

54) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 9.

55) Thomas Kalinowski and Hyekyung Cho, "Korea's Search for a Global Role between Hard Economic Interests and Soft Power," *European Journal of Development Research* 24-2 (April 2012), pp. 242-260.

processes, including foreign policy making. ODA as well as other foreign policies often also include a component that benefits Korean economic interests, such as the 'resource diplomacy' of closer relations with countries with desirable resources.

### *1. Responsible Global Player*

As noted above, role conceptions are affected by external role prescriptions (the alter part of the role conception). Advanced democracies have created a network of international and multilateral organizations and norms that other countries, in particular newcomers, are expected to follow. The international role prescriptions expect greater personnel and financial contributions to PKO as part of UN and multinational missions as well as other UN-efforts. Korean foreign policy makers are well aware of the expanding international role perceptions. Growing prosperity increases Korea's social capacity to perform a more diverse range of roles. South Korea joined the 'club of developed countries', the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996 and was reclassified as an advanced economy by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1997. Moreover, Korea was the first nation to graduate from a recipient of ODA to a donor country in 2009.

In light of this, the Global Korea strategy states, "whereas the Republic of Korea has hitherto focused its energies on nation-building and development, the time is now ripe for Korea to strive to become a more dignified country and to find its place among the ranks of advanced nations."[56] The self-perceived role prescription of foreign policy makers envisages a higher international standing for Korea as a "widely respected" country that "seek[s] what is universally acceptable to East Asia and the world" without engaging "in a self-centered pursuit of our national interests."[57] While the former statements refer to a role perception of a selfless global player, a competing role informs the latter statements regarding Korean interests and domestic welfare. The connection between national interests and external responsibilities is also noted in the Global Korea strategy: the "concept of national interest is becoming increasingly wedded to global public welfare,

56) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 12.
57) *Ibid*., p. 14; Cheong Wa Dae, *Government... op. cit*., Objective 20.

and a state's external legitimacy and leadership are thus predicated on its ability to combine the national interest with the global public welfare."[58]

The desire to promote Korea as an international player is fed by the ideational influences on foreign policy decision-makers, in particular a renewed sense of national pride and self-confidence evolving in the twenty-first century.[59] This also includes greater engagement as host of international meetings and institutions, opportunities to present Korea to the outside world and thus raise its international profile. Korea has hosted a number of events with a wide range of topics and target audiences, from sports events (e.g., Formula 1 car racing) to political meetings such as the G20 Meeting in November 2010 and the Nuclear Security Summit in March 2012. Such events not only attract high-profile participants to Korea but generate substantial international attention on Korea. These efforts are seen as a means for the effective projection of power.[60] At political meetings, the host can influence the agenda, and bring its own contribution, helping to shape the international environment in its image.[61] Despite the inconvenience and cost for host countries, President Lee promoted these meetings with the message that it would "no longer be possible to discuss a global issue without including Korea," since Korea is moving "away from the periphery of Asia to the center of the world."[62] Korea is also engaged in efforts to become a regional player by bringing Southeast Asian countries closer to Northeast Asia with initiatives such as the Busan Aid Effectiveness Summit in 2011.

Another means to increase global recognition and international standing is the promotion of 'hubs', building up regional economic or scientific centers.[63] The country actively seeks to house international organizations such as the UN Green Climate Fund in an effort to raise its profile and affect the agenda through its staff. Influence through immediate participation is also

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58) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 8.
59) Scott Snyder, "Lee Myung-bak's Foreign Policy: A 250-day Assessment," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 21-1 (January 2009), pp. 85-102.
60) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 10.
61) *Ibid*., p. 13.
62) Mark Macdonald, "G20 Event to Showcase Korea's Arrival," *New York Times* (9 November 2010).
63) Peter Murphy, "The Limits of Soft Power," in Daniel Black, Stephen Epstein, and Alison Tokita (eds.), *Complicated Currents: Media Flows, Soft Power and East Asia* (Melbourne: Monash University e-press, 2010), pp. 15.1-15.14.

promoted in the foreign policy strategy, as the Lee government hopes "to enable more Koreans to take part in helping to meet global challenges by joining these organizations," following the examples of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and World Bank Group Leader Jim Kim.[64] Korean foreign policy makers are thus aiming to satisfy two different role expectations: that of a responsible global player and at the same time a respected country in the international arena. In the perception and interpretation of international norms, these roles are closely connected. "Our contributions abroad and international peace-keeping activities should not be pursued merely as instruments of assistance. Rather, they should be approached from a comprehensive perspective of improving Korea's international standing and potential to serve overseas."[65] Both international norms and domestic pressures thus influence the role perception. This also reflects a domestic desire to raise Korea's profile on the global stage, or in marketing terms, 'Korea's global brand.'[66] This focus on nation branding is a new addition by the Lee administration to the role of respected country.

Korean foreign policy performance includes international commitments such as the participation in multinational PKO as well as the increase and diversification of ODA. Both mark a departure from being a recipient of such services to becoming a donor. South Korea benefitted from international military support during the Korean War (1950-1953) when UN troops fought along South Korean units. As a result, involvement in PKO is seen partially as 'payback' for the UN involvement in the Korean conflict.[67] In the 1960s, South Korea deployed troops to Vietnam in support of its ally, the United States. This troop deployment was prompted by concerns about national security, the strength of the military alliance with the United States, and economic advantages.[68] In the twenty-first century, changes in the national

64) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 26.
65) *Ibid*., p. 27.
66) The hype surrounding the success of Singer Psy's *Gangnam-Style* in 2012 is a good example of such desires. See, for example, Young-jin Kim, "Ambassador Says Psy Boosts Korea-U.S. Ties," *Korea Times* (11 November 2012). See also Philipp Olbrich and David Shim, "South Korea's Quest for Global Influence," *Global Asia* 7-3 (Fall 2012a), pp. 100-107.
67) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 30; Sook-Jong Lee, *op. cit*.
68) Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, "In the Service of Pharaoh? The United States and the Deployment of Korean Troops in Vietnam, 1965-1968," *Pacific Historical Review* 68-3 (August 1999), pp. 425-449.

role conception mean that Korea sees itself as an independent actor who fulfils an international role beyond the bilateral alliance with the United States. Perpetuating the growing role conceptions of its predecessors, the Lee government sought to expand Korea's "international role in order to help deal proactively with threats to global peace and security, whether they be terrorism, WMDs, transnational crimes, climate change, energy crisis, and ethnic and religious conflicts."[69]

In the decision makers' perception, Korea now has the material resources to fulfill its (perceived) role as a middle power. While poorer countries such as Pakistan participate in UN missions partially to increase income through the payments provided by the UN for deployed soldiers, this income is of marginal relevance for Korean troops. In terms of numbers, Korean involvement in PKO has been comparatively low. Military units have been dispatched under the framework of UN or multinational PKO as well as humanitarian missions to Afghanistan, Haiti, and Lebanon, among other countries.[70] The focus is on humanitarian concerns, including the supervision of ceasefires and reconstruction efforts with growing emphasis on human security.[71] The deployment of a naval destroyer to the international task force off the Somali coast to protect shipping routes from pirates is an exception from the involvement in humanitarian missions, but raised Korea's profile as a willing collaborator in international affairs, in particular if trade routes are affected. In addition to the fulfillment of external role expectations, such efforts also have strategic value, to contribute to military confidence building with neighboring countries, a clearly stated goal of the strategy.[72] Domestically, highlighting Korea's role as a mature global player and framing PKO as international duty helps to create legitimacy for such deployments and other military interventions which would otherwise not be acceptable, as public opinion defines the main role of the South Korean armed forces as deterrent of the North Korean threat.

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69) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 20.

70) In March 2013, 973 Koreans were serving in UN and multinational forces. Data from Hangukgun haeoipagyeonhyeonhwang [South Korean expatriate status] (2013. 3. 7), available at <http://www.peacekeeping.or.kr> (accessed on 20 March 2013).

71) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 8. The lack of larger contributions and military forces has been criticized both internationally as well as domestically.

72) *Ibid*., p. 36.

## *2. Economic Power*

The role of global player is informed by international structures as well as the perceptions of foreign policy makers of the expectations of the international community. At the same time, a different role, that of a strong economic power also affects foreign policy performance. In the twenty-first century, economic prowess is expected to become a more critical determinant of a country's relative standing and power.[73] The focus on economic strength is influenced by the prevailing paradigm regarding economic development, highlighting the influence of society on role conceptions. In the past, the symbiotic relationship between state and business supported the growth of Korean economic growth (often referred to as "Korea Inc."). Although democratization reduced the role of the state, Lee Myung-bak describes himself as 'CEO president', perpetuating the image of the country as a company (run for profit).[74] This understanding of the state's role in economic development is perpetuated on an international level. While in the past, the government protected domestic markets for the benefit of local companies, pro-business activities are expanded to the promotion of Korean companies and their products in overseas markets since Korea is highly dependent on foreign trade. This covers products as diverse as nuclear power stations and concerts of K-pop stars. There is also a perceived connection of the national economic agenda with national defense.[75] "Defense diplomacy" is expected to be broadened to include countries in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East to foster defense industrial and technological cooperation and to open new export opportunities in those regions.[76]

The development of Korea's ODA illuminates changes in the foreign policy role conception and performance. In response to international expectations as well as self-perceived role as example and donor, ODA and related activities have increased. Korea has been engaged in development activities since 1987 but ODA gained higher priority under the government of Roh Moo-hyun

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73) *Ibid*., p. 30.
74) Mark Macdonald, *op. cit*. This is discussed in detail in Thomas Kalinowski and Hyekyung Cho, *op. cit*. The ego-part of the role is displayed, since Lee's drive for 'global Korea' is connected to his experiences as CEO of a globally-active company.
75) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 33.
76) *Ibid*., p. 36.

(2003-2008).[77] In late 2009, Korea became the twenty-fourth member of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), thus graduating from recipient to donor. As member of the DAC, Korea is expected to increase its ODA and to advance Korea's aid system to comply with DAC rules, requiring a quantitative and qualitative shift in its ODA commitment. While in 2002, 0.05% of the GNI were spent on ODA, this grew to 0.12% in 2011. In absolute terms, ODA doubled from 2007 to 2011, but remains well below OECD-standards. Korea has rapidly expanded the number and geographical range of countries. Nearly two thirds of ODA were spent in Asia, with Vietnam, a key economic partner and market, the top recipient.[78] The rise in ODA is not universally welcomed in the Korean public where concerns about inequality within its borders and the potential costs of unification override the concern for international inequality.[79] As with PKO, the role of responsible global player overrides such concerns among policy makers.

In addition, the type and distribution of ODA are criticized. In the past, Korea often granted aid tied to specific projects or carried a conditional component that resulted in an advantage for Korean interests. Aid was, for instance, granted under the condition of preferential treatment for Korean corporations when contracts are being awarded, or privileged access to the natural resources of recipient countries.[80] ODA continues to be targeted at countries where Korea has a strategic or economic interest. During his tenure, President Lee Myung-bak undertook state visits to more countries than any of his predecessors, including the African continent and Greenland, both first-time destinations for a Korean president. A common thread of the external activities is the focus on countries that have economic value, as potential

77) Data from OECD, International Development Statistics (IDS) online databases on aid and other resource flows, available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/international-development-statistics.htm> (accessed on 20 March 2013).

78) *Ibid*. Humanitarian aid funds for North Korea are not included in ODA-data, as the northern half of the peninsula is considered Korean territory. See also Philipp Olbrich and David Shim, 2012a, *op. cit*.

79) Author's research; David H. Lumsdaine and James C. Schopf. "Changing Values and the Recent Rise in Korean Development Assistance," *The Pacific Review* 20-2 (June 2007), pp. 221-255.

80) Hyuk-Sang Sohn, Sungsik Ahn, and Jiyoung Hong, "What Matters in Determining Korean ODA Allocation: An Empirical Analysis of Bilateral Aid since 1991," *Korean Political Science Review* 45-6 (December 2011), pp. 45-68.

markets or source of resources. "Energy diplomacy" is a key component of Korean foreign policy performance, since it "is not merely an economic imperative, but also has direct ramifications for a nation's security."[81] The strategic plan goes on to highlight the need to forge closer ties with resource rich countries through various channels. Among the recipients of aid in Africa and Latin America, countries with high oil reserves such as Angola and Ecuador are in the top ranks. Resource diplomacy and reciprocal agreements are also contrary to the agreements of DAC.[82]

The continuation of such behavior is driven by two competing roles; on the one hand, the expectations of a global player and on the other, that of an economic power that also looks after its own interests. The Global Korea vision aims to bridge this gap by promoting a pragmatic foreign policy that places high priority on Korean economic advantages, showing the persistence of both roles.[83] OECD-audits find not all policies and projects compliant with DAC-guidelines, as they prioritize donor interests. These guidelines are, however, challenged by new players in the ODA field, including Korea, since they reflect the values and interests of developed, wealthy nations in Europe and North America.

In order to raise Korea's profile, bilateral projects are favored over multilateral projects (under the auspices of the World Bank, for example; 75% in 2011), since the identification of a donor country is limited in the latter case. As a successful case of economic and political development, Korea aims to promote its model of development, with a prioritization of human capital, reflecting the Korean experience of rapid economic development based on a well-educated workforce. The main development aid agency, KOICA, and other agencies thus offer a number of training programs both in Korea and in host countries. Human exchanges are a core component, in particular when compared to other donors. These activities are not related to a direct gain in hard power but have ideational influences and create soft power, playing into the role conception of a respected global player.

As part of development aid, Lee Myung-bak personally promoted the creation of World Friends Korea, a volunteer organization similar to the

81) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 27.
82) For an in-depth discussion, see Philipp Olbrich and David Shim, 2012b, *op. cit*.
83) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 30.

American Peace Corps. The connection of volunteering and promotion of a benevolent image of Korea are implicit, far more so than in the established practice of hiring locals to transfer knowledge and provide income.[84] While in the field, the volunteers are easily identified as Korean through logos on their clothing and other materials. The Korean volunteers are trained and sent by a number of organizations under the umbrella of World Friends Korea, and participate in activities such as IT-training, taekwondo, and medical officers. Many participants are young students, who gain valuable experience in their host countries, including language skills. Upon completion of their work, some volunteers are sought after by Korean companies seeking to expand their activities into such countries.[85] The effects of such activities and their relevance for the recipient countries are under debate.

### *3. Culturally Relevant Player*

In the early 2000s, there has been a shift in Korea's foreign policy role performance from a focus on interstate relations and diplomats to the wider public and their views on Korea, or, in Nye's terms, Korean soft power. This is a side-effect of democratization in Korea and the growing awareness among foreign policy makers regarding the effects of public opinion on foreign policy, both domestically and in other countries.[86] The prevalence of nationalistic values among Koreans, in particular a strong feeling of pride in Korean culture, is widely documented.[87] Foreign policy makers as part of society carry such values and seek to highlight cultural nationalism for their political advantage.[88] National pride informs the role as 'culturally relevant' on an international level, the ambition to step out of the shadow of the two

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84) *Ibid*.

85) KOTRA aims to prepare returnees for work in such positions; Agatha Maia Pereia, "The Role of Overseas Volunteering in South Korea's ODA" (Master's thesis, Gyeongsang National University, 2013).

86) Cheong Wa Dae, 2009, *op. cit*., p. 20.

87) For a detailed analysis, see Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Jane Duckett and William L. Miller, *The Open Economy and Its Enemies: Public Attitudes in East Asia and Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 104 and p. 114.

88) Kiseon Chung and Hyun Choe, "South Korean National Pride: Determinants, Change and Suggestions," *Asian Perspective* 32-1 (January 2008), pp. 99-123.

large neighbors, China and Japan. The national role performance thus includes measures to promote a country "that is respected widely," as well the task of "enhancing the value of Korea's state brand globally."[89] To this end, President Roh Moo-hyun created a 'National Image Committee' under the Office of the Prime Minister. His successor Lee Myung-bak upgraded the agency to the 'Presidential Committee on Nation Branding' with wider responsibilities. Representatives from the business community were well represented in the committee, highlighting the connection between nation brand and economic advantages.[90] The role imagination refers back to the perceived role of the state as a driver of economic development that has been expanded beyond national borders in the interpretation of the conservative administration.

National pride among foreign policy makers and citizens also extends to Korean companies and products and their international success.[91] The potential of cultural exports as a means to build soft power coincided with the growing popularity of Korean pop music, TV programs, and films in neighboring countries and further afield since the early 2000s, often summarized under the term *Hallyu*, the 'Korean Wave'. Beyond the financial benefits for the artists and production companies, such cultural exports also promote Korean products through product placements, increasing their overseas market value. In a form of commercial nationalism, the Korean government is aiming to translate this surge of Korean cultural exports into financial gains for private companies. This is a further example of the aforementioned understanding of the state as supporter of companies, which is now expanded to overseas markets. The role of cultural relevant player is thus informed by commercial considerations and attitudes harking back to an earlier period of economic development. The shortcomings of the government's attempts to influence the popularity of cultural exports was highlighted by the success of Psy's *Gangnam-Style* which, in 2012, found a global audience without any government support or backing by a large entertainment company.

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89) Cheong Wa Dae, *Government... op. cit*.; Philip Olbrich and David Shim, 2012a, *op. cit*.

90) For a detailed analysis, see Alena Schmuck, "Nation Branding in South Korea: A Modern Continuation of the Developmental State?" in Rüdiger Frank, James E. Hoare, Patrick Köllner, and Susan Pares (eds.), *Korea Yearbook* 2011 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 91-117.

91) Kiseon Chung and Hyun Choe, *op. cit*.

*Hallyu* is believed to create affinity with Korea, cultivate interest among global audiences, and also raise Korea's profile and brand value.[92] An often-cited example for this effect are Japanese housewives studying Korean after becoming enamored with Korean TV programs.[93] As it is seen as a means for foreigners to access Korea, culture is given an instrumental value. Another contentious point is the lack of general discussion regarding the image or shared understanding of the definition of "Korean culture" that the government aims to promote. Contemporary TV shows and songs are often hybrid in nature, combining a modern, 'western' lifestyle with local influences that is more acceptable to Asian audiences.[94] Some policymakers (and citizens) embrace *Hallyu* as it demonstrates the 'superiority' of Korean popular culture and is thus a source of national pride.[95] This short discussion indicates that the role of cultural relevant country is filled with several attributes: economic power, international standing, and the promotion of Korean culture. These feed into domestic expectations, the milieu foreign policy makers are embedded in.

## Ⅳ. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the benefit of using a role theory approach to the analysis of Korean foreign policy in the early twenty-first century. The analytical framework of role theory links structural variables (international norms) with agency (national role conception). The identification of different roles can also account for contradictions in the foreign policy performance. Their influence on national role conception is thus an important part of

92) Keehyeung Lee, "Mapping Out the Cultural Politics of 'the Korea Wave' in Contemporary South Korea," in Beng Huat Chua and Koichi Iwabuchi (eds.), *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), pp. 175-189.

93) Yoshitake Mori, "*Winter Sonata* and Cultural Practices of Active Fans in Japan: Considering Middle-Aged Women as Cultural Agents," in Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (eds.), *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), pp. 127-141.

94) Doobo Shim, "The Growth of Korean Cultural Industries and the Korean Wave," in Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (eds.), *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008), pp. 15-31.

95) Keehyeung Lee, *op. cit*., p. 182.

foreign policy analysis. With growing prosperity, consecutive Korean administrations have expanded foreign policy plans beyond the strategic security challenges to the peninsula. These new activities include measures to expand Korea's hard power, often measured in economic terms, but also components to increase Korea's international standing and recognition. In order to gain a deeper understanding of such complex changes and their origins, role theory provides useful tools, as it focuses on socially constructed values, norms, and attitudes as well as structural effects.

As Korea is more exposed to global interaction, the number of roles influencing the national role conception is increasing, confirming the findings of other case studies. Leaving aside concerns of national security related to North Korea, the study identifies the ascendancy of three main roles in the national role conception, namely respected global player, economic power, and culturally respected country. The national role conception of Korean foreign policy makers is characterized by a mixture of continuities and changes, reflecting competing domestic and international norms and expectations. Foreign policy makers react to the international expectations, the alter ego part, that expect greater involvement, as reflected in growing ODA and PKO involvement. However, an equally important part is their self-prescription of such expectations, the ego part. Domestic understandings of the role of the state in economic development add another dimension—these initiatives should also bring benefits for Korea and Korean companies. This economic nationalism plays to the role of being a global economic power, but contradicts international norms. While this related to hard power, the growing importance of nontangible, soft power in the form of cultural influence is also recognized, in the role of a respected culture. These two roles illustrate and explain the continuity of national role conceptions and foreign policy performance grounded in the ideas of a developmental state. The analysis of the Global Korea strategy confirms the core assumption of role theory, namely the embeddedness of roles in cultural identities and paradigms with a shared understanding of the nation's role in the international arena. The role theory framework thus contributes further insights to the analysis of Korean foreign policy making. Ideally, future research will expand the analysis of foreign policy roles, include more primary and secondary material as well as a longitudinal comparison of the three administrations of the twenty-first century (Roh Moo-hyun, Lee Myung-bak, and Park Geun-hye). This would

bring further insights in the continuities and changes of role conceptions in Korea and form the basis for comparative work.

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